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Pentagon Issues Warning on Security Leaks

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Deputy defense secretary Frank Carlucci, who took a hard line on security leaks while deputy director of the CIA, has issued a severe warning to Pentagon employees about disclosing secret information.

"It will be the policy of this department to deal firmly and promptly with all employees who betray this responsibility" to protect secrets, Carlucci said in a memo dated April 15.

"Unauthorized disclosures of classified information, whether intentional or inadvertent, will not be tolerated," the memo said.

"Past disclosures have damaged our relations with other governments, reduced our lead in weapons technology and resulted in the loss of irreplaceable intelligence sources," the memo said. It did not cite any examples.

One disclosure that is known to have provoked the Pentagon's civilian hierarchy

was a recent wire service article stating that radio communications between Soviet headquarters and field commands in Poland had decreased, indicating an easing of the crisis.

Pentagon officials complained at the time that the report tipped off the Soviets that those communications were being intercepted, impelling them to use a different net and thus costing the U.S. intelligence community a source of information.

Although it is widely known that the United States and other nations eavesdrop on communications, articles about this almost always upset intelligence specialists such as Carlucci.

The article also might have irked Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger because it ran at the same time that he was portraying the Polish situation as an unrelenting crisis.

Besides its references to specific leaks, the contents of the memo were described as normal for a new administration trying to lay down the law early on. But it could

mark the beginning of a crackdown on the release of information about Pentagon activities reminiscent of the administration of secretary Robert S. McNamara in the 1960s.

Carlucci's memo went to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the three service secretaries and other civilian executives of defense agencies.

Henry Catto, the Pentagon's acting spokesman, issued a follow-up memo to Carlucci's. "In addition to posing a threat to national security," Catto said, "unauthorized disclosures tend to make our work more difficult by stimulating inquiries about the subject matters revealed. We cannot afford even one slip-up, inadvertent or otherwise."

"To give added emphasis to security consciousness, I urge you to convene your staffs periodically for a reminder that each staff member who handles classified or sensitive information is personally responsible for its protection."